

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 SCCT-01 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 OC-05 CCO-00

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O R 071050Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3261

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3064

ROME FOR AMBASSADOR GODLEY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PGOV LE

SUBJECT: SECURITY SITUATION IN LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 3028

1. AS OF MID-DAY MAR 7, TENSE SECURITY SITUATION IN BEIRUT
AND OTHER MAJOR URBAN AREAS REMAINS MUCH AS OUTLINED REFTTEL.
FUNERAL OF LEFTIST LEADER MAAROUF SAAD IS SCHEDULED TAKE PLACE
AT NOON IN DISON AND WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY SERVICES AT MOSQUES
IN BEIRUT AND OTHER TOWNS HAVING LARGE SUNNI MOSLEM POPULATIONS.
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LARGE MOURNING PROCESSIONS AND DEMONSTRATIONS STAGED BY LEFTIST

AND SUNNI ELEMENTS ARE EXPECTED TO FOLLOW THIS AFTERNOON IN BEIRUT, SIDON AND TRIPOLI. ALTHOUGH LEBANESE SECURITY AUTHORITIES HOPE THESE WILL OCCUR WITHOUT MAJOR DISTURBANCES, THEY ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC.

2. RIGHT NOW BEIRUT IS GENERALLY QUIET AS RESULT OF GENERAL STRIKE, BUT GROUPS OF MEN (SOME OF THEM ARMED) CAN BE OBSERVED AT ROADBLOCKS SCATTERED THROUGHOUT CITY, AND SCATTERED SMALL-ARMS FIRE (PROBABLY IN AIR) PLUS SEVERAL LOUD EXPLOSIONS (APPARENTLY SONIC BOOMS CAUSED BY OVERFLYING ISRAELI AIRCRAFT) WERE HEARD DURING LATE MORNING HOURS. CORNICHE MAZRAA AREA IS PARALYZED, WITH ARMED FEDAYEEN FROM NEARBY CAMPS MUCH IN EVIDENCE, AND SEVERAL MAIN ROADS--INCLUDING THAT LEADING TO AIRPORT--IN OUTLYING AREAS ARE BLOCKED BY MILLING DEMONSTRATORS. ROAD LEADING FROM EMBASSY TO MAIN HOTEL DISTRICT ALSO BLOCKED. LEBANESE SECURITY AUTHORITIES HAVE TAKEN UNUSUAL PRECAUTION OF PUBLICLY URGING ALL FOREIGNERS TO STAY OFF STREETS.

3. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH WE HOPE THAT DAY WILL PASS WITHOUT FURTHER TROUBLE, POSSIBILITY OF UGLY INCIDENTS AND VIOLENCE OCCURRING IS STILL WITH US. SITUATION IS COMPOUNDED BY FACT THAT EVENTS OVER PAST NINE DAYS HAVE TENDED INCREASINGLY TO ASSUME CONFESSIONAL OVERTONES, WITH SUNNI MOSLEMS DISPLAYING GROWING AND OPEN DISSATISFACTION OVER WHAT THEY REGARD AS CHRISTIAN MONOPOLIZATION OF POWER WITHIN GOL AND COUNTRY AT LARGE. (HIGHER ISLAMIC COUNCIL ON MARCH 6 ISSUED STRONG DEMAND FOR SOLH CABINET TO RESIGN, BLAMING CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS ENTIRELY ON PRES FRANGIE, ARMY LEADERSHIP AND PRIMIN SOLH). CHRISTIANS, IN RETURN, HAVE TENDED MORE AND MORE TO REACT HOSTILELY TO THESE PRESSUREES, ATTRIBUTING THEM TO LEFTIST AND PALESTINIAN "SUBVERSION" AND MANIPULATION OF SUNNI POPULATION. ALTHOUGH MANY LEADERS ON BOTH SIDES ARE STILL COUNSELLING MODERATION, THERE IS NO TELLING WHERE EVENTS OF NEXT 12-24 HOURS MAY LEAD. WE EXPECT TO HAVE BETTER PICTURE OF SITUATION WHEN SAAD FUNERAL AND ITS AFTERMATH ARE OVER.

4. IN VIEW OF FOREGOING, I HAVE SENT NON-ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES HOME AT 1030 LOCAL AND INSTRUCTED THEM TO REMAIN THERE FOR REMAINDER MARCH 7. BRITISH EMBASSY HAS DONE THE SAME.
HOUGHTON

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